

The pipeline problem: where do we go from here?

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In her January 2007 *Journal of the Medical Library Association* editorial [1], "The Next Challenge: Where Do We Go From Here?" Nunzia Bettinsoli Giuse, AHIP, FMLA, described the "richness and diversity of talent" in medical libraries and challenged readers to deal with the problem of professional librarians who decide to leave the library environment for other professions. The discussion of "where do we go from here?" has another aspect, however. Just as we must focus on expanding librarians' roles and opportunities for advancement, we must also focus on pipeline issues. If, as Giuse fears, many talented expert librarians will leave the field, what will happen when this loss is coupled with the expected retirement of the "baby boomer" generation, which has peopled libraries since the 1960s [2]?

As a profession, we need to look at the changing demographics of library education as well as the issue of recruiting the next generation of colleagues. The reports of the MLA's 2001–2003 Task Force to Plan Recruitment for the 21st Century Workforce of health information professionals have some good ideas. As a result of the task force's work, MLA's new Professional Recruitment and Retention Committee was approved as a standing committee for the association in September 2006.

The 2003 report from the MLA recruitment task force read, in part,

Evidence suggests that while a large percentage of the current medical librarian workforce will be eligible to retire in this decade, there is not a pipeline of new recruits sufficient to fill positions that will become vacant . . . Evidence also suggests that new library school graduates are turning with more frequency to "high tech" jobs in industry that pay higher salaries and may be considered more glamorous than library jobs. . . . In short, medical libraries are facing a shortage of people both interested in and qualified to form the 21st cen-

tury health information professional workforce. [3]

There are two possible courses of action to alleviate this shortage that we, as a profession, should consider: one in the short run and the other as a long-range activity.

In the near future, we must look around for the colleagues who do not have the master's of library and information science (MLIS) degree and find ways to encourage these talented individuals to seek the graduate degree that defines professionalism for us. Looking around us for the person who has a baccalaureate degree and significant library experience should not be difficult. Given the increasing number of distance education opportunities for professional education, it is often more a matter of enabling that colleague to invest the minimum of two years that is typically required to earn an MLIS in an online program. Maintaining regular employment and providing or retaining the normal benefits must be coupled with flexibility in work scheduling and academic support. If colleagues do choose this option, be sure that they choose online study programs that are accredited, are well established, and offer appropriate coursework in health sciences resources and information technology.

Choosing a program from a school that is a member of the Web-based Information Science Education (WISE) consortium [4] is also a wise idea. This consortium of 12 LIS programs and i-Schools allows students to register for online classes from partner schools at the home tuition rate. Several of the WISE schools regularly offer a range of health sciences librarianship courses that are not routinely offered in other LIS schools. Also a sophisticated model for moving staff from nonprofessional to professional careers has been tried at Vanderbilt University [5]. Three staff members at the Eskin Biomedical Library, while working in nonprofessional positions, complet-

ed two years of online education in the University of Pittsburgh Fast-Track MLIS program [6], followed by a formal post-master's internship year. Staff members from two other academic health sciences libraries and one from a large hospital library are now following a similar path.

The long-range issue is to recruit the next generation. Research suggests that young people of the Millennial Generation—individuals born between 1980 and 2000—make choices about their possible careers quite early, and they (and their parents) rule in and rule out career choices when they are still in high school [7]. Our challenge is to provide role models and opportunities for an age group that will not enter our ranks for at least eight to ten years.

One approach to this challenge can be seen in the work of the Careers in Health Information, Librarianship, and Informatics (CHILI) project [8, 9], which seeks specifically to plan recruitment activities that target high school age youth from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. The participants are from eight leading academic health sciences center libraries—Georgetown University, Houston Academy of Medicine-Texas Medical Center, Howard University, University of Colorado, Johns Hopkins University, Washington University, St. Louis, Yale University, and the University of Tennessee at Memphis. Among the tactics that the CHILI group has found effective in attracting the attention of high school students of color have been shadowing events such as a "Groundhog Job Shadow Day" [10], summer internships (preferably with a paycheck attached), participation in high school magnet programs, and programming that involves high school science teachers.

The challenges of peopling our profession for the twenty-first century will be with us for years to come. We have initial evidence that we should be cultivating both our colleagues and high school stu-

dents, but that we will need to work together to accomplish the goal of filling the pipeline. What will you do to help us attract the best and the brightest?

A note regarding full disclosure: I am or have been involved with all of the activities described in this editorial: I served on the MLA Task Force to Plan Recruitment of the 21st Century Workforce; I teach in a WISE-participating i-School; I am a coprincipal investigator on the Vanderbilt federal Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant; and I am an advisor for the CHILI project. It should also be noted that the WISE consortium, the Vanderbilt/Pittsburgh model, and the CHILI project have all been funded by IMLS [11].

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